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DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CEN RBEAL AND PRM/ECA KPONGONIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREF PREL ELAB EAID CS

SUBJECT: COSTA RICA: PROPOSALS FOR 2008 AMBASSADOR'S FUND FOR  
REFUGEES

REF: STATE 6779

¶1. Please find below Embassy San Jose's submission two projects for the 2008 Ambassador's Fund for Refugees. Post provided full texts of the proposals to Kate Pongonis, PRM/ECA, in April.

¶2. PROJECT 1 DESCRIPTION: USD 14,992 to local NGO "International Advisors and Consultants Association" (ACAI) to establish a computer training lab for refugees which will improve the participants' preparation for effective labor insertion. The center will be located at the Desamparados "House of Rights," which provides legal and development services to the local refugee population. According to UNHCR statistics and the National Direction of Migration, at the end of the year 2007, Costa Rica had 17,710 asylum applicants plus UNHCR "people of interest" who could benefit from this training. A majority of them live in the Desamparados neighborhood.

Their main challenge in successfully integrating in the community is job placement. Many of the refugees lack appropriate skills for the Costa Rican job market, which extends their dependence on governmental aid programs and exacerbates their resettlement challenges. ACAI's computer training seeks to enhance their skills and thereby improve their opportunities for employment. ACAI will use the Ambassadors Fund grant to purchase:

- 6 computers
- network printer
- wireless installation
- computer licenses
- instructor time at \$4 per hour
- miscellaneous supplies such as paper, ink, photocopies
- computer chairs and tables

¶3. PROJECT 2 DESCRIPTION: USD 5000 to establish a micro-credit program to help refugees purchase basic supplies to start small enterprises. This is intended primarily for graduates of ACAI's "Rapid Impact" training program, but others could apply for the loans if they already have business skills. The Rapid Impact program teaches vocational skills such as baking and pastry making, cosmetology (including make-up artistry and manicures/pedicures), jewelry making, flower arranging, etc. The program helps students develop basic work skills while they are receiving other, more extensive job training or awaiting an Immigration decision on their status.

The micro-credit program is designed to provide small loans of no more than USD 200, at 10% interest, to help these refugees purchase basic supplies needed to start their own businesses (i.e. manicure/pedicure equipment). The project includes an evaluation of each applicant's abilities, business proposal, and start-up costs required. ACAI plans to reach 30 refugees with the Ambassadors Fund grant.

¶4. JUSTIFICATION FOR THIS REQUEST: Project 1 is designed to be part of the comprehensive strategy envisioned by UNHCR and ACAI to integrate new refugees into Costa Rica society as rapidly and successfully as possible. The "House of Rights" facility is integral to this process. Refugees without marketable skills can receive

computer training at the center to increase their employment opportunities. Project 2 offers the refugees small loans to enable them to start a new business with their existing or newly-learned skills. Both projects are aimed at increasing refugees' chances of successful entry into the work force and lessening their dependency on aid programs.

**15. AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION/MANAGEMENT OF THE PROJECT FUNDS:** UNHCR's local NGO implementing partner ACAI will manage the projects. UNHCR representative in Costa Rica Jozef Merkx is supportive of this initiative and Post has worked with ACAI previously in refugee assistance projects. Post has on file ACAI's signed Code of Conduct consistent with the six core principals from the Inter-Agency Standing Co